

## **PRINTED IN THE KINGSBURG RECORDER NOVEMBER 19, 2003**

### **Another village could grow in Kingsburg**

*By Patrick O'Donnell  
Recorder Staff*

Kingsburg -- Councilman David Karstetter would like to bring Fresno's Fig Garden Village to the "Swedish village".

The plan calls for a shopping area that could offer large stores, ample parking, tree-shaded parking areas and an outdoor shopping mall set at varying angles with large walkway overhangs as part of the building design. Karstetter feels Kingsburg could use such a center as a gateway to its downtown area.

At the Nov. 13 Planning Commission meeting the Economic Development Coordinator Jolene Polyack explained to the commissioners Karstetter's vision.

"My wife and I like to shop at Fig Garden Mall on occasion, and I've noticed that people don't just shop there and leave. They go there to spend time. They listen to music, shop, eat, meander, and then, later, go home. Draper Street is kinda like that. People come, eat, walk around, then go home," said Karstetter.

He said that the key is the Marion Street corridor. Karstetter said that going from Albertson's down to Draper Street, there is a lot of available land. He explained that the area consists of a wide boulevard street with several medium to large undeveloped blocks of land available for sale. He said that there is presently some difficulty in marketing those properties in a way that would avoid hodge-podge development of this core area.

Karstetter explained that he was suggesting to the Economic Development Committee to develop the area with an overall architectural design and theme. The model would be aimed at attracting some up-scale businesses as anchors. However, the architectural design, said Karstetter, should, of course, incorporate Kingsburg's overall downtown theme of a Swedish village.

He explained that the construction of an upscale shopping mall in Kingsburg would provide shopping not currently available in south Fresno County or indeed in the central and southern areas of Fresno itself.

Polyack said that when Karstetter first approached the Economic Development Committee, she was thinking of the stores that are located in Fig Garden Village; Anne Taylor, Patrick James, etc., and she said that she couldn't see any of those chains setting up stores in Kingsburg. Despite the fact that Kingsburg has a high level of income, it doesn't seem to hold the numbers those stores are looking for.

She did however, think that they could attract some high-end clothing stores that are already located around Sanger and Visalia. Polyack said that Visalia's downtown is in somewhat of an upheaval currently and that Kingsburg is in a position where they can take advantage of that.

Polyack said that they'd spoken with the downtown merchants and, for the most part, they'd responded positively toward the idea. "We were worried they'd see it as us working against them, but the majority have seen eye to eye with us."

Time is of the essence though, both Polyack and Karstetter expressed that they need to start moving if they want to make such a project a reality. "We need to really start nailing down what we want this to look like, and we need to do it now," said Polyack. "If we don't set this up correctly, anyone'll be able to put up anything."

Karstetter added that they want the citizens, planning commission and city council to all be aware of this project. He said that if the commissioners were agreeable, they'd also ask that Marion Street be re-titled 'Swedish Village Way'.

Planning Commission Chairperson Erwin Ohannesian was very fond of the idea. "I like the plan. I think it's a great idea, but you're gonna need some seed money," he said. "They did a nice thing along Simpson, but if we don't have expectations/guidelines in place, they're gonna go with whoever throws down the money."

Polyack said that they feel this project should get placed high on the list of things that need to get moving soon.

"When I first started out, this would have been very low on my list, but it's just that there is so much available space at this time," she said.

Vice-Chairperson Merton Parlier was very understandable to the issue of time. "We need to get things in order as soon as possible... There will never be as much bare land available as there is right now."

There was some concern over how developers could be prevented from selling to the first interested buyer that comes along, but City Attorney Leland Stephenson and Schmal eased the concern by explaining that even if a developer walked in with a bag of money, the city still has the safety net of a site plan review, however, Stephenson urged that they don't want to keep developers in the dark about the city's plans either, so it would be important to put things in motion as soon as possible.

The planning commission will discuss the issue with the Kingsburg City Council when the two groups meet for a joint session tonight, Nov. 19.

(November 19, 2003 Newspaper Publication)